

International vigil set Sept. 26

Abedini, persecuted Christians spotlighted

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) — As Christian pastor Saeed Abedini nears the second anniversary of imprisonment in Iran because of his faith, his wife Naghmeh is organizing a Sept. 26 worldwide prayer vigil for Abedini and other Christians persecuted for their faith.

N. ABEDINI

"I'm doing a prayer vigil on this day to remember Pastor Saeed and others who are imprisoned for Christ, but also as a chance to come together as the Body of Christ and see the move of God as we pray together," she said in a video posted on the Be Heard Project's website, an initiative of the American Center for Law and Justice. "Please join me on this special day as we come together and pray."

As of Sept. 18, groups had signed up to host individual prayer meetings at more than 418 locations in the United



BEFORE IMPRISONMENT — This video was captured from a May, 2012 YouTube video Saeed Abedini made before his 2013 imprisonment for his faith. In the video, he shares his conversion experience and encourages persecuted Christians to persevere. (BP image)

States, including Southern Baptist churches, the White House, the steps of state capitols, and Christian churches of various denominations.

Abedini is serving an eight-year sentence imposed Jan. 27, 2013, on charges he threatened national security by planting house churches in Iran years earlier. Iran refuses to recognize the U.S. citizenship Abedini gained in 2010.

Abedini faces death threats

in prison and avoids exercise sessions when radical Islamists would most likely try to kill him, the U.S. Center for Law and Justice reported in August. His wife and their two children remain in Idaho.

Abedini, who was actually arrested while working on an orphanage in the hard-line Islamist country, is known to suffer health problems and has been beaten and tortured many times while in prison. Aside

from a few press releases and short statements by high officials, the U.S. government's public response to Abedini's situation has been tepid.

The prayer vigil comes as at least three other Christian pastors in Iran are facing charges deemed punishable by death, Morning Star News reported.

Lead pastor Behnam Irani

see ABEDINI on p. 9

Evangelical group seeks 'marriage equality'

NASHVILLE (BP) — Southern Baptist theologians and ethicists have taken exception to a new organization named Evangelicals for Marriage Equality that is advocating for same sex marriage in the name of evangelical Christianity.

Evangelicals for Marriage Equality (EME) debuted Sept. 9, saying in a statement of belief at its website that a person "can be a devout, Bible-believing evangelical and support the right of same-sex couples to be recognized by the government as married."

"While EME affirms the significance of marriage and recognizes America's devotion to religious liberty... we also believe that in a religiously diverse society, no one religious perspective should determine who can and cannot be married," the statement says.

In response, Southern Baptist leaders told Baptist Press the EME position contradicts God's Word, revises the Creator's definition of marriage, and abandons any biblical standard for sexuality.

"We've seen this before," said Russell D. Moore, president of

see EVANGELICAL on p. 9

Prayer urged for workers spreading Gospel

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) — Southern Baptists are encouraged to take time on Oct. 2 to pray for pastors and missionaries engaged in spreading the Gospel worldwide. A half-hour prayer webcast begins at 9:02 a.m., and can be viewed at namb.net/tenttwo. The event will also be archived for future viewing at the same site.

The special day, including a webcast, is part of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) TenTwo prayer emphasis, based on Jesus' call in Luke 10:2 to pray for more workers in the harvest field. NAMB President Kevin Ezell, newly-elected International Mission Board President David Platt, and Southern Baptist Con-

vention President Ronnie Floyd will lead the TenTwo webcast.

"There is absolutely no substitute for prayer in any facet of life," Ezell said. "Prayer is the primary, fundamental

need in any mission endeavor. I would not think of taking any action without God's counsel, and TenTwo is a daily reminder that living life on mission includes praying for others as God sends them to the mission field."

Floyd, pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, said prayer is "the greatest action we can take to mobilize our churches and raise up

next-generation missionaries to reach the world for Christ.

"God can do more in a moment than we can do in a lifetime. This is why each of us should participate with the TenTwo webcast where we gather to pray online from across the world."

"No great movement of God ever occurs without first being preceded by the extraordinary prayer of God's people. This webcast is an expression of God's people praying in an extraordinary way."

"I hope many will join us as we call out to God together for the world to be reached for Christ."

To learn more about prayer support for Southern Baptists, visit namb.net/tenttwo or imb.org/main/pray.



EZELL



PLATT

"No great movement of God ever occurs without first being preceded by the extraordinary prayer of God's people."

Ronnie Floyd

Southern Baptist Convention president

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Our careless words

The young man approached the village elder with a heavy heart. "Teacher, I have sinned against my neighbor," the young man said. "In a fit of anger, I whispered untrue rumors to the itching ears in our small village, and now my neighbor's reputation has been ruined. How can I ever make recompense?"

The wise elder pondered the young man's predicament and said, "My son, I can see you are sincere. Here is what you must do. After everyone has gone to sleep this evening, take with you a bag of feathers and place one feather on every doorstep in the village. Then return to me at first light."

The young man did exactly as the sage instructed. As soon as the sun rose the next morning, the anxious young man sought out the elder. "Teacher, I have done as you said. Not one home in the entire village has been overlooked," he pointed out. "Now what must I do?"

The elder said, "Tonight, while the people of the village are once again sleeping, go back to the doorsteps and retrieve every feather. You must not miss a single feather, lest your effort be in vain."

The young man did as the teacher directed, but was unsuccessful. "I cannot do as you told me," he said. "All the feathers have been blown to the wind and I will never be able to recover them all."

"So it is with your words," the wise old man replied. "No matter how sincere your grief over your careless words, you can never retrieve all of them. It is a burden you must carry for the rest of your life."

The ancient tale of the young man and his careless words recently came to mind when a brother in Christ shared with me a rumor about a fellow believer. My spirit sank as I grasped both the seeds of destruction in his words and how many times in the past I had been complicit in the same regard.

People have taken great delight in spreading rumors, gossip, and innuendo since, well, since there

have been people. We apparently like hearing that trash, and the only activity we enjoy more than listening to it is spreading it around ourselves. We weren't meant to use the incredible communications skills God created in us for such unspiritual conduct.

As the young man learned the hard way, a whispered word here and a suggestive comment there will quickly and undeservedly destroy someone's reputation. It's sad that we don't seem to care any more deeply than we do about the victims and their loved ones.

Why is that so? The third chapter of the Book of James holds some answers, as translated in the Holman Christian Standard Bible:

Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal. And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell. Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue.

Maybe Mississippi is no different from any other place, but it sure seems of late that we have had considerably more than our fair share of rumors, gossip, and innuendo. This should not be so, leastwise among the brethren. We need to understand that there are very few actions capable of doing greater violence to our witness than our tongues.

Our prayer should be that God deliver us from this restless evil and help us develop the discipline to banish such unrighteousness from our lives, so that no one will spend eternity in hell because our witness was compromised by our words.

A lost world is watching. It's up to us.

How to work with men

I grew up as the only girl with four brothers. From the very beginning of my life, God was teaching me how to be a woman in a room full of men. I'm often asked, "You seem so comfortable being at the leadership table with men. Why?"

Truthfully, across my ministry career I have been the blessed one. I have served with godly men — leaders and world-changers in the culture. I have been respected and treated as a valued ministry partner with the men God has allowed me to serve alongside.

That being said, I'd be lying if I said sometimes the reality that I am the only woman at the table doesn't occur to me, tempting me to question my position, to feel inadequate and insecure, and to simply want to hold back. Whether you are in the business world, on church staff, or find yourself on a team with all men, here are a few things I've learned:

■ **Lay your ego aside.** It's a myth that in order to sit at the table with men, you have to be extra-competitive, extra-strong, extra-smart, or extra-anything. It's a myth that you have to win at all costs, prove yourself, exalt yourself, or be better than everyone else at the table.

Jesus said that to live, you must first die. To be first, you must be last. Get over yourself and come to the table as a servant and only then can you lead.

■ **You are a woman.** Just because I'm surrounded by men doesn't mean I am one. You don't need to lose your femininity to work with men. In fact, part of what you offer is your unique perspective as a woman. You have insight and perspective that complements and adds to the overall strength of the leadership table.

With that said, it's probably not a good idea to burst into tears because you didn't make your projected revenue for the quarter or you missed the deadline on a major project. Accept responsibility, but also accept that God created you as a woman and has placed you in a place of leadership. (It is okay to shed tears over spiritual things or matters of the heart.)

■ **Always respect the men with whom you work.** Make it a rule that you will always honor the men with whom you work, not because they are



Guest opinion
with Selma Wilson

perfect or always right but because you honor them as men God has placed in leadership.

The culture is full of men-bashing. I will have no part of it. Do not cut down the men with whom you work, either to their faces or behind their backs. Of course it's fine to joke around (guys tend to do that), but know the difference between teasing and mocking.

Men need respect. That is true of our husbands, our sons, and the men with whom we work. When you show a man respect, you will earn respect in return. This doesn't mean you won't disagree. It is the opposite. When you do disagree with respect and offer another view or solution, you will be heard.

■ **Don't hold back.** God placed you in your role for a reason. You have something to contribute. If you have something to say, say it. If you have an objection or concern, raise it. If you have an idea, share it. The men you work with need you to be engaged as someone who partners with them for the overall health of the organization or team you lead.

Have confidence that comes from the Lord. Be respectful but bold. Men will listen and your contribution may be exactly what is needed.

■ **Toughen up.** Being a leader means debating ideas, hearing objections, and arguing (sometimes passionately) for the best in an opportunity to advance or a problem to solve. Don't take it personally when your ideas get shot down. The goal is not that you win, but that the organization or team you lead wins.

When you make a mistake, own it. Don't make excuse, but learn from it. When you need help, ask for it. A good dose of humility always helps us grow

see WILSON on p. 11

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Baptists note complacency in Nazi rise to power

NASHVILLE (BP) — The 80th anniversary of a courageous stand by Christians in Germany who opposed Adolf Hitler and the Nazis also marks a sad chapter in Baptist history that festered four decades before Baptists voiced repentance.

In contrast to Christians who resisted Nazi evils, German Baptists "were just happy to be left alone, you might say," historian Albert Wardin told Baptist Press, "and they were just happy to have the regime allow them to preach the Gospel within their churches, and so the German Baptists were not going to take any position that would counter any of the positions of the Hitler regime."

Meanwhile, a diverse conglomeration of Christians from several denominations called the Confessing Church issued what came to be known as the Barmen Declaration, a 1934 document stating that Jesus, not Hitler, was Lord of the church and condemning false doctrines espoused by the Nazi-controlled state church.

Some supporters of the declaration lost their lives. While many 21st century Southern Baptists disagree with some of their theological positions, the courage of these leaders continues to inspire a new generation of Christ-followers.

Confessing Church

When Hitler and his National Socialist Party came to power in 1933, he appeared to be a friend of Christians, outlawing pornography and professing to be Catholic. Secretly though, he believed Christianity was nonsense because its message of repentance and humility contradicted the National Socialist agenda of ruthlessness and strength.

Before Hitler's true beliefs were known, however, Germany's Protestant federation agreed to establish a national church sympathetic to the Nazis. Through a series of political maneuvers, Hitler had his adviser on religious affairs, Ludwig Müller, installed as the national church's bishop and the Führer became its supreme head.

In 1933, Nazi officials met with Baptists to discuss incorporation into the state church, but Baptists objected and eventually the idea was dropped.

German Christians, as members of the national church were called, attempted to purge Christianity of elements deemed too Jewish and banned non-Aryans from serving as paid clergy. In allegiance to Hitler, some German Christians spoke of baptism as being into the Weltanschauung (world-view) of the Führer.

Many professing Christians in Germany saw no incompatibility between their faith and the Nazi-controlled church, but a group of largely Lutheran and Reformed believers — including theologians Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer — recognized the errors of Nazi ideology and formed the Confessing Church to protest.

Barmen Declaration

The high water mark of the Confessing Church came in May 1934, when it issued the Barmen Declaration, authored principally by Barth.

The declaration rejected the "false doctrine" of German Christians that "the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well."

The document opposed "attempts to establish the unity" of the state church "by



TROUBLED TIMES — Symbolizing German Baptists' complacent relationship with the Nazis, the backdrop of the speakers' platform at the 1934 Baptist World Congress in Berlin included a large swastika flag alongside a cross and portraits of famous Baptists. (BP photo courtesy of American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries)

means of false doctrine by the use of force and insincere practices." The declaration also exalted Jesus as the highest source of authority and invited, "If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us!"

As word of the Barmen Declaration spread across the world, Hitler and his allies were portrayed in some media as oppressive. They began to receive negative publicity for their anti-Jewish policies — the seeds of anti-Semitism that led to the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust.

In response to this negative publicity, the Nazis wanted to demonstrate publicly their religious tolerance. A Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Congress scheduled to meet in Berlin in August 1934 presented an opportunity.

Although German Baptists still feared they would be incorporated into the state church, government officials assured them there was no reason to worry and offered to provide financial support for the Baptist World Congress. One Nazi official met with BWA leaders in New York and said Germany's government welcomed Baptists and would grant them full freedom of speech.

Baptists in Germany and elsewhere were pleased by the Nazi overtures, taking pains not to offend the German government.

Despite objections to Hitler's anti-Jewish policies by the Baptist Unions in Scotland and Australia, a BWA committee concluded that any official action criticizing the Nazis might "prejudice" the German government against the nation's Baptists and should be avoided.

"The German Baptists, in their effort to achieve social respectability and to avoid being forced into a homogenized national church, failed to recognize that they were being used," German theologian Erich Geldbach wrote in *Baptists Together In Christ*, a centennial history of the BWA.

The timing of the Baptist World Congress bolstered Hitler. Two days before it began, German President Paul von Hindenburg died and Hitler, formerly the chancellor, became Germany's dictator.

In an attempt to demonstrate an acceptance of Christianity before the world, the backdrop of the BWA speakers' platform included a giant swastika flag, a cross, and portraits of famous Baptists. Speakers who appeared in front of the swastika included Southern Baptist George W. Truett, who was elected BWA president at the meeting.

During the Congress, Bishop Müller of

the state church told a BWA delegation that his objective was to secure preaching of the Gospel in Germany, that he regarded Baptists as brothers, and that they would not be incorporated into the national church. The BWA responded with a resolution of appreciation.

Baptists "went along with the times," said Wardin, the author of many books on Baptists and other Protestants in Eastern Europe, "and in a totalitarian regime, it's easier to go along with the times."

Fraternal relations between Baptists and Nazis extended beyond the BWA meeting. Although German Baptists suffered persecution for 100 years before Hitler's rise, Nazis used the police to protect Baptists from harassment and granted them favorable locations for ministry.

In isolated instances German Baptists opposed Nazi policies, as in 1934 when the editor of a popular Baptist publication urged disobedience of an order that boys not discuss religion in the Hitler Youth.

When Baptists realized Hitler's true plans and became victims of persecution themselves, the opportunity to take a meaningful stand had passed. Three Baptist pastors were sent to prison or concentration camps, according to one count, and many experienced persecution.

Rejecting Nazis

Baptist complacency was a stark contrast to the courage exhibited by members of the Confessing Church.

Bonhoeffer, who earned a doctoral degree at age 21, led an illegal seminary before fleeing to America on the eve of World War II to avoid being drafted by Hitler's army. After just 26 days in the U.S., he felt that God was calling him back to Germany.

Upon his return, Bonhoeffer secured a job with the German military intelligence agency so he could become a double agent and relay information to Germany's enemies. He also was involved in a failed plot to assassinate Hitler.

Eventually Bonhoeffer was arrested for his involvement in a plan to save seven Jews from execution. He was hanged in 1945 at age 39.

Madison Grace, a Southwestern Seminary professor who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Bonhoeffer, told BP that theologically Bonhoeffer was not an evangelical. Though he held the Bible in high esteem, he did not believe it to be inerrant, Grace

said, adding that much of his thought was steeped in the liberalism of his time.

Grace said Bonhoeffer's errors do not negate his courage. "I don't think that we have to take wholesale what a person believes and judge them by that solely. When you look at someone like Bonhoeffer, you recognize that it's noble what he did here with his courage but I don't think that because I like him in that respect, it means I have to like everything about him or his theology."

Eric Metaxas, who wrote a biography of Bonhoeffer, said in his book, *Seven Men*, "Somehow Bonhoeffer saw from the very beginning what no one else seemed to see — that Hitler and the philosophy he represented would end tragically, and that Nazi ideology could not coexist with Christianity."

Barth, perhaps the 20th century's most influential theologian, also was an outspoken critic, describing Nazi law as "an utter betrayal of the Gospel."

Southeastern Seminary professor Nathan Finn noted that Barth, like Bonhoeffer, did not believe the Bible was inerrant. Barth also believed everyone would be saved in the end. Still, he took the Bible seriously and "showed remarkable discernment in recognizing what was happening and remarkable courage in standing up for the lordship of Jesus Christ rather than the lordship of a Führer who thought that the state church was part of his wider vision." Finn, associate professor of historical theology and Baptist studies, told BP.

In 1933 a senior Nazi official condemned Barth's theology before a crowd of 20,000 at the Berlin Sports Palace. Yet the following month Barth defied the Nazis by saying in a sermon that Jesus was a Jew and that mistreatment of Jews was inconsistent with Christianity — a statement that caused some in the audience to walk out.

Barth had an influence on many mid-20th century Southern Baptist theologians, and some knew him personally. Southern Seminary professors Dale Moody, Wayne Ward, Harold Tribble, Ray Summers, and David Mueller all took at least one class under Barth.

Baptists repent

Individual Baptists confessed their complicity with Hitler following the war, but not until 1984 did German Baptists formally express regret that they failed to support Bonhoeffer, Barth, and others in the Confessing Church.

"Recognizing the evil at the beginning was more difficult than it appears today in retrospect," Germany's Baptists said at a European Baptist Federation Congress in Hamburg. "At that time, notwithstanding, there were among us those who detected the real nature of that regime, who warned against it and opposed courageously the injustice. Nevertheless, we did not publicly join the strife nor the sufferings of the Confessing Church, and failed to withstand more consciously the violations of divine commandments and injunctions. We, the German Baptist Union, are humbled by having been subordinated often to the ideological seduction of that time, in not having shown greater courage in acknowledging truth and justice."

Finn said all believers should join German Baptists in seeking to emulate the Confessing Church's courage in the face of moral challenges. He cited religious liberty and defense of traditional marriage as issues on which such courage is needed today.

I was passing through Lafayette County one morning when I passed by a big sign out in this field that said, "Kudzu Control Demonstration." I had seen those signs in other places, and for some reason this one just captured my attention and brought a flood of memories to the forefront of my brain. It is not unusual to run into someone who is a visitor to our state or passing through Mississippi and in certain areas sees this incredible vine growing all along the sides of the road, and they want to know what in the world is that. Whether it's in Yazoo County or on I-20 from Vicksburg to Jackson or up in the northeast hills of Mississippi, you'll run into kudzu, but the reason the kudzu control sign got my attention is because I used to live in the vicinity of where that sign is. I was in the fourth grade at Oxford Elementary School and some people came to our school with some boxes with pieces of a vine. They told us that we lived around where there might be some gullies, to take several of these plantings, and just go out in the area and stick them in the ground.

Well, where I lived there was a lot of erosion, and we used to love to play in those gullies, climbing the walls and finding rocks and clay. Since most of the other kids were getting some cuttings of kudzu, I did too, took them home, and said that the people from the government instructed us to plant them out there near the gullies and it would help stop the erosion. So I, along with hundreds of other kids, took our little pieces of kudzu and stuck them in the ground all around Lafayette County and beyond. Now we didn't see immediate results, of course, but now that it's been a long time since I was in the fourth grade, I looked back and learned some lessons from planting kudzu.

One lesson is we did a good job. I had no idea what kudzu was or how fast it grew or how it would take over the land and hills and trees, but if they wanted it planted and to cover the landscape, a bunch of elementary kids, especially the fourth grade boys, did a good job. I did not realize at the time, but through the years I found in that experience and many others that there



With Jim Fuiral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Kudzu Control

is a great reward, a great delight that comes to your heart, from doing a good job. The Bible says, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccles. 9:10). I know that our Lord was not talking about planting kudzu when he said that one day if we serve well we will hear those wonderful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things" (Matt. 25:23), but there is great joy ahead if we serve well.

The second thought that came to my mind when I saw the kudzu control sign was that every decision in life has consequences. Sometimes they are good consequences and sometimes they are bad consequences, and sometimes there are consequences that you're not sure which one they might be. I often talk to teachers and parents who are trying to, in every way possible, instill in children the importance of making right decisions because decisions have consequences. Consequences may be immediate or it may be years before you see the full blown result of your actions. Sometimes you live and die and still have never seen the full impact of your decisions and actions. In the case of the kudzu, it was just a little cutting with some roots dangling that if you stick in the ground, it seems to grow ferociously. I've seen it climb up and

over-take large trees to the extent that the tree cannot get any sunlight and eventually dies. I have seen kudzu cover up buildings. Of course, it will stop erosion, but as you talk to some folks who live around kudzu, you will quickly understand it starts some other problems. Every action has consequences. Some parents never understand that their decision to not go to church and not to be faithful to the things of God will bring consequences in their children. It may take a lifetime before those parents see those consequences, but they will come. Everything has consequences and fallout. Getting married, getting divorced, going in debt, getting out of debt, filing bankruptcy, going to college, studying hard, applying yourself at work, being lazy and slothful, taking drugs, encouraging your children to drink moderately, being too lenient with your children, being too strict with your children. Yes, they all have consequences.

A third thing came to my mind as I saw the kudzu sign that even good things, good decisions with good impact, may also have some unintended consequences. It is important that a person develop a spiritual sense of evaluation and judgment about things because whatever you do will have some unintended and maybe not even thought of consequences. Who would have ever dreamed that decades

ago when some guys from the U. S. government encouraged some kids just to put out some kudzu vines so that they could stop the erosion of the land would then see a program develop to try to control the kudzu they had unleashed? Momentary decisions need to have some projected thought about the possibilities that may lie ahead if this works or in some cases, doesn't work.

The news is filled every day with people who made decisions that maybe in retrospect were dumb decisions; maybe when they come to light in the public, just absolutely stupid decisions. All of that because in time what they did had unintended consequences, consequences that they had not factored into the equation. Now here is a fact: anytime, anywhere, anybody who makes a sinful decision knowingly, deliberately disobeying God in doing the wrong thing or the self-willed thing, there will be consequences that you hadn't thought about or never even dreamed of. At the moment, it may seem expedient, pleasurable, a great reward is on the way, but there are other things that will accompany it that you may have never heard of.

One example from Scripture is at the end of Jesus's life and one of his disciples decides the best thing to do is just to get what you can because this ministry and this discipleship business isn't going to work out. Judas connects with the religious leaders who are plotting against Jesus and agrees on a payday. Thirty pieces of silver, a payoff, a pocketful of money and he can go on his way. You can't make that decision, you can't go that direction, you can't cut that deal without some unintended consequences. For him it was the tragedy of a dumb, willful, sinful decision and the consequences would be the burden of guilt, a tortured mind, and in some ways an irreversible tragedy. What he thought was so good was absolutely so bad. Sometimes when you see kudzu on the roadside you might remember and think about the great blessings that were going to come for Judas. It's more like kudzu gone wild.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

First Person: Keep 'Internet pastors' in proper perspective

By Darrel Girardier
Correspondent

As a kid I grew up listening to preachers on the radio like John MacArthur and Charles Stanley. It wasn't a weekly thing, but occasionally on the weekend you might find one of their sermons on the house stereo. If I wanted to listen to more of their sermons, I had to either tune in at a certain time or order their sermons on cassette or CD.

Fast forward to today and we have a plethora of options from which to choose. I can listen to or watch a sermon on a church's website or download a podcast. Either way, we now have sermons on demand whenever and however we want them.

In theory, there's a lot of good that can come from this. First is the obvious advancement of the

Gospel and second is the ability for us to have others speak God's truth into our lives.

However, some of us now have gone beyond just listening to these sermons. We've developed our own Internet pastors.

By "Internet pastors," I mean pastors we religiously follow online. We read their tweets, every blog post they publish, and every book they write, and we listen to every sermon they preach. We hang on their every word. Before you know it, the Internet pastor replaces our pastor at our local church.

Is that really healthy? Is that how churches and pastors were designed to function? Can the rise of the Internet pastor undercut the ministry of local pastors? I think it's time we break up with our Internet pastors. Let me tell you why.



GIRARDIER

While your favorite Internet pastor may preach a great sermon, when it comes to actually ministering to you in your time of need, your Internet pastor won't be there. When your loved one passes away or your marriage hits a rough streak, you can't pick up the phone and call the pastor you listen to online. Sure, you can tweet at them or try to email them, but unless you live in their area, their assistant will tell you to talk to your local church. I'm not discounting the

impact that a sermon from a pastor miles away can have, but there's local aspect to ministry that a pastor provides that can't be replicated online. You see, your pastor is your church's pastor for a reason.

God called him there for a specific purpose and when we try to replace him (intentionally or unintentionally) with an Internet pastor, we can forget about that calling. We forget about their spiritual authority over our congregation, or the fact that when they prepare a sermon they are providing local context to Scripture that someone miles away from us can't do.

Now you might say, "My pastor doesn't go deep enough," or "I'm not being fed by his sermons." While I don't know your particular situation, I do know that you have to ask yourself if you've

prepared your heart to receive what they preach.

The pastor's sermon is only half of the equation. You, the church member receiving the sermon, are the other part. Don't discount your pastor's sermon because you weren't ready to receive it.

We need to champion the pastors who stand behind our pulpits and get up at dawn to do their share of hospital visits. We need to affirm their calling to our churches and begin take seriously our responsibilities as church members.

God has given you and your church a pastor. Love them, celebrate them. I'm sure they need it.

Girardier is the digital strategy director for Brentwood Church in Brentwood, TN. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style.

The Name Has Changed But the Problem Remains

People are hungry. Kids go to bed at night without a nourishing meal. We can sit and argue as to why this is so, but kids are still hungry. Hunger can be blamed on poverty, parents, and politics, but no matter the cause, the fact is our world is starving and this ought not be so.

For years Southern Baptists emphasized the World Hunger Fund. The name of this effort was changed to Global Hunger Relief in 2013. We all know that changing the name of an effort does not in and of itself make the effort more effective. The name has changed, but the hunger is still all around us.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

estimates that nearly 870 million people of the 7.1 billion people in the world, or one in eight, were suffering from chronic undernourishment between 2010 and 2012. Almost all the hungry people live in developing countries—852 million of them. Sixteen million reside in developed countries like America, England, and France.

Sometimes we forget the importance and the impact of providing food for those who are food insecure. First we provide one of life's necessities. It says we care about you and your condition. But an often-overlooked fact is that these hunger relief funds feed unreached people groups which



with Jimmy Porter

then opens the door for sharing the gospel.

The Bible gives us several examples of God providing the daily necessities of life for his people during times of special need. It becomes our responsibility to serve others and while serving others, we serve him. Jesus in Matthew 25 speaks of judgment and the separation of people, like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. He states in Matthew 25:35 that the righteous were the ones who fed him, gave him water, invited him into their homes, clothed him and cared for him when he was sick and in prison. His point was that when we meet the basic needs of one's life, it is as though we are doing it unto him.

Southern Baptists and Mississippi Baptists understand the problem, but knowledge without action produces nothing. James 2:14-16 (NIV) reads, "What good is it, my brother, if

a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; Keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same breath he remarked, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me' (Matthew 25:40.)

Donations for hunger relief have been in decline for the past several years. In 2000 Southern Baptists gave \$6.3 million to hunger relief but only \$4.6 million in 2011. Hopefully, that trend will stop and gifts will begin to rise again. In 2013 the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the International Mission Board (IMB) together reported \$5,464,069.74 for Global Hunger Relief.

Last year NAMB distributed \$1.1 million to approximately 1,300 hunger ministries with over 22,000 professions of faith in North America. The IMB had close to \$4.4 million to utilize in battling global hunger. Each year great numbers come to know our Savior due to Southern Baptists' willingness to share God's blessings with those without food and drink. Mississippi Baptists have always been one of the first in line to assist hurting people, especially here at home. Our disaster relief units have

traveled and fed thousands upon thousands of individuals who have been involved in storms, flooding, and other disasters. But hunger is different. So often it is across the street, around the block, or perhaps in another section of town. Storms and flooding are easily seen and create a quick response, but their needs are supplied in time. Hunger is silent and never goes away, sometimes never detected. This is why World Hunger Sunday, October 12th, is so important for Southern and Mississippi Baptists. We give so others can live!

In the year 2012, Mississippi Baptists gave \$199,198.66 for hunger relief and \$187,156.02 in 2013. May we all be challenged to give more than we gave last year. So the name, whether it is Global Hunger Relief or World Hunger Day, is not what matters. What matters is our commitment to address this issue by observing World Hunger/Global Hunger Relief Day on October 12 and by giving generously! Our prayer should be, "Lord, open my eyes and my hands so as to see and give."

Porter serves as executive director-treasurer for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3332 or jporter@christianaction.com.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular and/or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

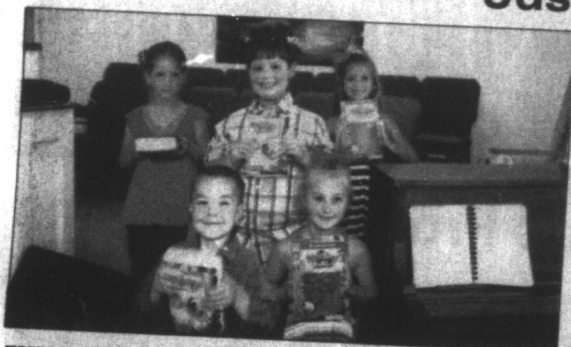
Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Just for the Record



EMMANUEL CHURCH, COLUMBIA, presented Bibles to its first graders and sashes, vests, and badges to its G.A.'s. Shown are the two groups.



In other Church News:

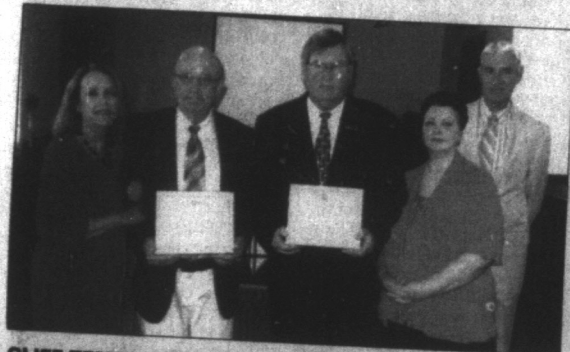
► The Area IV WMU Fall Meeting will be at **Ackerman Church, Ackerman**, Oct. 2. Registration, 9:30 a.m.; meeting, 10 a.m. - noon, followed by lunch. Rhonda Kelley, speaker.

► The **Beginnings Church, Poplarville**, is hosting a Christ in Concert event Sept. 27, 5:30 p.m. Musicians include Chad Perry, Refuge, the Kat Du-frenes' Band and Hyperphly. Love offering; refreshments.

► **Moselle Memorial Church, Moselle**, is hosting a catfish dinner Sept. 27, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. \$8/plate; eat in or carry out.

► **Hopewell Church, Little Rock**, will have National Back to Church Sunday service Sept. 28, 11 a.m.

► There will be a Ministers and Staff Golf Tournament at the Pontotoc Country Club Oct. 7, 9 a.m. Cost: \$60; buy two mulligans for \$5. The format is a two-man scramble (have team formed before coming). Twenty-seven holes; nine holes for flying. Lunch provided. Prizes. For information and registration, call (662) 489-1962.



CLIFF TEMPLE CHURCH, NATCHEZ, recently ordained two new deacons. Shown are Lisa & Roger Heard, James & Susan Woodard, and pastor Russell Wagoner.



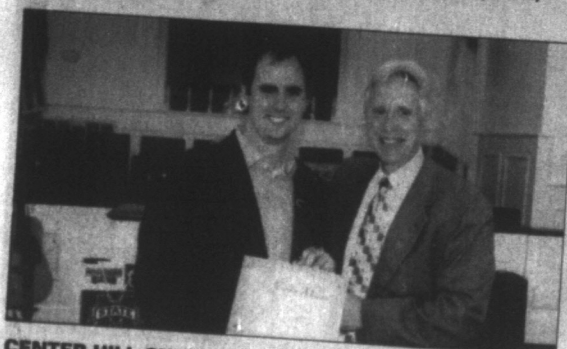
The youth group of **NESHOBA CHURCH, UNION**, participated in M-Fuge at the University of the Columbians in Williamsburg, Ky.



CRESTVIEW CHURCH, PETAL, recognized the following for their long-term service to the church. Shown with pastor Steve Smith, far left, are Lou Holder, Mattie Baylis, Mary Lou Stephens, George Nelson, Curtis Waller, Harvey Stephens, and Ricky Farris.



FREDONIA CHURCH, NEW ALBANY, held its annual mission organization recognition service Aug. 27 to honor Mission Friends, G.A.'s, and R.A.'s. Acteens were honored in a separate ceremony.



CENTER HILL CHURCH, HAMILTON, held an ordination service for Mason Welch. He is serving as youth minister at First Church, Greensburg, La. Terry Edwards, pastor.



STRONG RIVER CHURCH, PINOLA, held their annual VBS in July.

Just for the Record



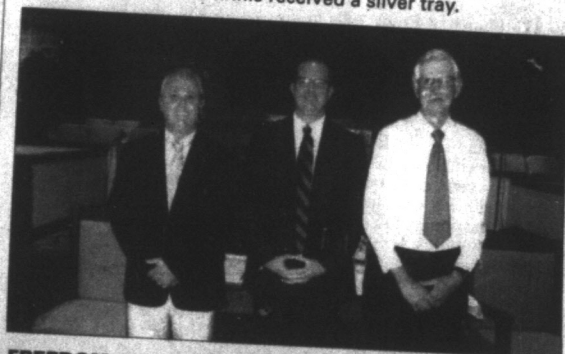
PINE GROVE CHURCH, PICAYUNE, recently ordained Michael Guidry, Brian Edwards, Ken Hall, Todd Spiers, Jacob McKinley, Ricky Ramos, and Mike Hayes as deacons.



HOLLY SPRINGS CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN, held a reception at Shiver's Fish House to honor pastor and Mrs. Glen McInnis for 43 years of service. McInnis was presented a plaque and Mrs. McInnis received a silver tray.



FAIR RIVER CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN, held a youth lock-in/overnight back to school bash Labor Day weekend. Shown are some of the participants with youth pastor Tim Johnson. Jay Anderson, pastor.



FREEDOM CHURCH, LAUREL, recently held a deacon ordination service for two men. Shown are Bryan Walters, pastor Tommy Davis, and Jack West, Jr.



GILLSBURG CHURCH, GILLSBURG, honored its summer Reading Railroad winners: Beau Williams, Dylan Rollins, and Harley Burris.



BLACK JACK CHURCH, VAUGHN, recently held a parent and baby dedication Aug. 17. Shown are Matt Cox, Rae Holland Cox, Amy Cox, Kylee Anne James, Krystal James, and pastor David White.



GOODWATER CHURCH, MAGEE, ordained Marney Walker as deacon Sept. 7. Shown are pastor Michael Giles, Walker, and his wife DeShea.



CARROLLTON CHURCH, CARROLLTON, ordained Mike Fair as deacon. Shown are Fair, his wife Ann, and pastor Fletcher Moorman.

Tenure at an end, Eliff bids IMB farewell

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — When International Mission Board (IMB) trustees unanimously elected Tom Eliff to lead the Southern Baptist missions agency in March 2011, the then 67-year-old former missionary, pastor, two-time Southern Baptist Convention president, and IMB vice president made it clear that he had big plans.

"I'm coming with a vision," Eliff said at the time, "and I will serve as long as God gives me grace and energy."

In February 2014, when Eliff asked IMB trustees to begin the search for his successor, he promised to "run through the finish line, until such a successor is found." On Aug. 27, IMB trustees elected David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, to succeed Eliff as IMB president.

Initiatives started

Born in Texas, Eliff is a fourth-generation Oklahoman and third-generation pastor. He served with his wife Jeannie as an IMB missionary to Zimbabwe in the early 1980s. They resigned in 1983 after their daughter Beth was seriously injured in a car accident there.

He was twice elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, in 1996 and 1997. He shepherded several key churches in the denomination, including First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Ok., where he was pastor from 1985-2005.

Eliff then served as IMB senior vice president for spiritual nurture and church relations from 2005-09. In that role, he taught and counseled missionaries and helped mobilize churches throughout the convention for missions involvement.

From 2009-11, he led Living in The Word Publications, a writing and speaking ministry he founded



Tom Eliff shares his testimony during a house church meeting in Havana, Cuba, in November 2013. (BP photo courtesy of IMB)

in 2005. He is the author of numerous books about prayer, spiritual awakening, and family life.

In his years as IMB president, Eliff never seemed to slow down. He introduced a number of initiatives at the missions agency, including:

- **Embrace**, in which churches commit to make disciples among previously unengaged, unreached people groups.

- **Ready Reserve**, which allows former field personnel to volunteer for overseas missions.

- **Marketplace Advance**, where business leaders and other professionals leverage their skills for the sake of the Great Commission.

- **Global Connect**, in which IMB partners with churches who are fully funding and sending out their church members as a part of their ongoing work among a people group.

- **School of Prayer for All Nations**, which equips churches in prayer for the nations.

Life-changing experience

"We are chasers of darkness," Eliff often said, "looking for the black holes of sin in our world

and thrusting into that darkness the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ."

Eliff's urgency and passion for the lost grew from an experience he had as a young pastor and swim coach. After a particularly grueling practice with his swimmers, Eliff jumped into the pool to relax. Floating on his back, he heard a voice: "I hear you're a preacher." Eliff opened his eyes and saw one of his swimmers standing on the edge of the pool. The boy had questions about God, Eliff recalled, and asked if they could talk.

"I didn't take the time to talk with him then," Eliff said. "Instead, I told him that we would set up a time."

That meeting never happened, and later Eliff learned the boy took his own life. That experience instilled in the young Eliff a deep sense of urgency to make Christ known at every opportunity. It also drove him to his knees in prayer.

Passionate in prayer

In remarks at a farewell luncheon for the Eliffs on Aug. 27, IMB executive vice president

Clyde Meador noted Eliff's passion for prayer.

Shortly after arriving at IMB as president, Eliff asked that a portion of his office suite be converted into a prayer room. Outfitted with a kneeling bench and a map of the nations on the wall, he spent time on his knees every day interceding for a lost world and those working to share the Gospel of Jesus with them.

"You prayed for 10 IMB staff members every day and devoted so much of our meeting times to prayer," Meador told Eliff during the luncheon. "Thank you for praying."

David Uth, senior pastor of First Church in Orlando, Fla., and former IMB trustee board chair who led the search for Eliff's successor, also noted Eliff's passion.

"I'll never forget the day we sat together... and I watched as you wept for the nations," Uth said. "Your passion for the lost is greater than any I've ever seen in anyone."

Cheerleaders

At his final Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting as IMB president, in Baltimore, Md., in June, Eliff thanked Southern Baptists for the opportunity to serve but acknowledged that God was leading him to step aside.

"We believe people support what they help create," Eliff said, "and it seems we have an entire generation of Southern Baptists who've yet to have an opportunity to help us create who we are. There comes a time when leaders need to be cheerleaders."

During the Aug. 27 IMB trustee meeting, amid cheers and applause, Eliff, 70, handed the reins of Southern Baptists' international missions organization to Platt who, at 36, is the youngest president in the history of the 169-year-old institution.

Staff Changes



MIDWAY CHURCH, LUCEDALE, has called Phillip Snodgrass, Jr., as pastor.



MIDWAY CHURCH, DECATUR, has called Ryan Reed as pastor. He is shown with his wife, Jordan.



MORGAN CHAPEL CHURCH, OKTIBBEHA COUNTY, has called Conner Pounders as youth minister.

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FAIRFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH IN MOSELLE, MS IS LOOKING FOR A PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER. Send resume to 942 Moselle Seminary Rd. Moselle, Ms 39459 or email to fairfield@bayspringstet.net

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MEADOWVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH, STARKVILLE, MS, IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR A FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC AND EDUCATION. Please mail resumes to Meadowview Baptist Church, Attn: Music Search Committee, 300 Linden Circle, Starkville, MS 39759.

DERMA BAPTIST CHURCH IN DERMA, MS IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC & EDUCATION. Resumes can be emailed to dermabaptist@tds.net or mailed to PO Box 67 Derma, MS 38839.

CEDAR GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH, COLUMBIA, MS IS SEEKING A PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER. Please call Bro. Todd Sumrall if interested. (601-341-0665).

STAR BAPTIST CHURCH, RANKIN COUNTY, MS IS SEEKING A PART-TIME MINISTRY ASSISTANT TO BEGIN 9-1-14. Must have basic knowledge of accounts payable and general ledger and be proficient in word and power point. Will be cross trained in other duties. Applications are available at starbaptistchurch.org or you may call 601-845-2736.

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EVANGELICAL

cont. from p. 1

the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville. "Every generation seems to have those who try to rewrite the portions of the Bible they are embarrassed about. But if evangelical theology is to keep the evangel, then we must not be ashamed of the Gospel or what it teaches about sexuality."

"This means holding firm to what the Scripture says and the church has believed about

marriage from Pentecost to the present."

EME's launch came as advocates await a possible ruling this term from the U.S. Supreme Court on same sex marriage. The justices' next term begins Oct. 6.

Same sex marriage already is legal in 19 states and the District of Columbia, and advocates have won in the last 15 months nearly all legal challenges to state laws limiting marriage to a man and a woman. Three federal appeals courts have struck down marriage protection laws, and de-

cisions are pending in three other circuit courts.

Some Southern Baptist commentators refuted the claim by EME spokesman Brandon Robertson that the organization is not taking a theological position on marriage. "We just want evangelicals to see that it is possible to hold a plethora of beliefs about sexuality and marriage while affirming the rights of LGBTQ men and women to be civilly married under the law," Robertson said, according to Religion News Service.

Andreas Kostenberger is senior research professor of New

Testament and biblical theology at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., where his wife is adjunct professor of women's studies.

"Whether or not this political ploy will succeed, it is a tragic and mistaken effort that will sadly leave gender confusion, broken lives and anarchy in its path," the Kostenbergers said. "Can any of us improve on God's design and set it aside with impunity? We fear that by advocating marriage equality, the same-sex revolution, with the transgender revolution in its wake, will likely further destabi-

lize the already fragmented social fabric of our culture."

Three evangelical publications — Christianity Today, Relevant, and WORLD — have declined advertising submitted by the group, according to EME.

EME's unveiling occurred about six weeks before an ERLC national conference designed to help Christians think in a Gospel-focused way regarding homosexuality and same sex marriage. The meeting, titled The Gospel, Homosexuality and the Future of Marriage, will be Oct. 27-29 in Nashville. For more information, visit erlc.com/conference.

Revivals & Homecomings

► **Richburg Church, Hattiesburg:** 100 year celebration; services, 11 a.m., followed by dinner on the grounds and gospel sing @ 2 p.m.; Gene Walley, speaker; Stevie Dewease, music; Paul Roney, pastor.

► **Macedonia Church, Blue Mountain:** Homecoming and revival, Sept. 28 — Oct. 1; Sun., service, 10 a.m.; singing, with 4 Ever Praise, 11 a.m., followed by potluck lunch; Mon. — Wed., 7 p.m.; potluck meal, 6 p.m.; Terry Faulkner, speaker; Terry Hall, pastor.

► **East Union Church, Magnolia:** Youth revival, Sept. 26 — 27; 6:30 p.m. nightly; Jim Bradford, speaker; music nightly; love offering; Nancy Mulligan, youth leader.

► **First Church, Southaven:** Revival, Sept. 28 — Oct. 1; Phil Glisson, speaker.

► **Goodwater Church, Magee:** Revival, Sept. 28 — Oct. 1; Sun., Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m., followed by potluck lunch and 6 p.m.; Mon. — Wed., 7 p.m.; Billy Williams, speaker; Paul Padgett, music; Michael Giles, pastor.

► **Toomsba Church, Lauderdale Association:** 130th anniversary, Sept. 28; services, 11 a.m., followed by potluck meal. Ben James, speaker; Donny Cobb, TBC Adult Choir and Praise Band, music; J. David Caves, pastor.

► **Damascus Church, Hazlehurst:** Homecoming and 190th anniversary, Sept. 28; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; worship service, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch; Randy Davis, speaker.

► **Rocky Point Church, Carthage:** Homecoming, Sept. 28; services, 10:30 a.m., followed by meal; Danny Sephton, speaker; By His Grace, music; Shane McGivney, pastor.

► **Academy Church, Blue Mountain:** Homecoming

and revival, Sept. 28 — Oct. 2; Sun., services, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch and singing with Heavens Mountain Band and Malcom Lindsey, 1:30 p.m.; Mon. — Thurs., 7 p.m.; Jimmy Russell, speaker; Randy White, music; Wayne Cobb, pastor.

► **Hope Church, Neshoba County:** Homecoming, Sept. 28; worship, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch; Allen Herrington, speaker; William Crenshaw, Fay and Reuben Moore, music; Dennis Duval, pastor.

► **Arbor Grove Church, Houston:** 125th anniversary, Sept. 27 — 28; Sat., 2 p.m., with games, activities, gospel singing, and supper; Sun., old fashioned day, 10 a.m., followed by potluck lunch.

► **Beulah Church, Lexington:** Homecoming, Sept. 28, 11 a.m., followed by lunch and afternoon singing @ 1:30 p.m.; David Skinner, speaker; special music by local talent.

► **Belden Church, Belden:** Homecoming, Sept. 28, 10 a.m., followed by lunch; Kenneth Gray, speaker; 70 voice choir, music; Jim Holcomb, pastor.

► **Fredonia Church, New Albany:** Homecoming, Sept. 28; service, 10 a.m., followed by fellowship meal; Richard Goodwin, speaker; David McClure, music.

► **Sunrise Church, Leake County:** Homecoming, Sept. 28; services, 11 a.m., followed by potluck lunch; Mark Metcalf, speaker; Tony Kinton, music.

► **Hebron Church, Smithdale:** 125th anniversary, Sept. 28; services, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch, opening of time capsule, and special music.

► **Oakland Church, Oakland:** Revival, Sept. 28 — Oct. 1; Sun., 6 p.m.; Mon. — Wed., 7 p.m.; Trent Jaudon, speaker; Larry Hardy, music; Steve McGregory, piano; Jimmy Hood, pastor.

BIBL i O O i P H E R

HZXVAF ND XYCFQ YCF ND SZJ, JXYJ

PJ PQ P NDQZAS: XYCFAZ NZ, YCF QZZ;

SVG Y QOPGPJ XYJX CVJ SAZQX YCF

HVCZQ, YQ DZ QZZ NZ XYBZ.

AKMZ JTZCJD-SVKG: JXPGJD-CPCZ

Clue: S = F

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 4:8.

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ABEDINI

cont. from p. 1

and assistant pastor Silas Rabani, both of the Church of Iran in Karaj, have been charged with "spreading corruption on Earth." Abdolreza Ali-Haghejad, another leader in the Church of Iran movement in Karaj, was originally charged with "warring against God," but a court has changed the charge to "spreading corruption on Earth," according to Morning Star News.

The charges are "a clear escalation in Iran's campaign against Persian Christians" and "an attempt to gain an apostasy conviction by other means," Mervyn Thomas, chief executive of the religious freedom organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said in a press statement.

So far this year, Iran has executed 12 people under the "warring against God" statute and two for "spreading corruption on Earth," Morning Star News reported.

When Iranian officials arrested Ali-Haghejad, they raided his home in Bardar-Anzali and captured two other Christians there, Mohammad Roghangir and Soroush Saraie, both converts from Islam. Both are thought to be held in Shiraz Prison. They have been found guilty of "action against the national security" and "propaganda against the order of the system."

Roghangir was sentenced to six years in prison. Saraie was sentenced to two and a half years. Appeals of their sentences failed.

Registration information for the prayer vigil is available by email at globalvigil2014@gmail.com and on the website, beheard-project.com/prayer-vigil/saeed.

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BCV EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Public Relations Assistant (BCV Headquarters, Ridgeland, MS)

Public Relations Assistant is a part-time (minimum of 20 hours) entry level position. This staff member should have a background in public relations, communications, journalism, marketing or other related field. A bachelor's degree is preferred, but one with equivalent experience or who is a senior level student in one of the aforementioned fields of study will be considered. This staff member should have strong writing, research and organizational skills, and have an understanding and respect for deadlines. It is important that they have an excellent phone presence and be enthusiastic, articulate, poised and professional in all circumstances. They must know Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint and be Internet and Social Media savvy, and be able to learn quickly and be trained on special software packages and applications. They must be available for some travel and willing, on occasion, to put in additional hours or be available on a weekend for special projects and events. In addition, they must have a willingness to learn and adapt to changing and new responsibilities. It is imperative that this individual have a strong understanding of Mississippi Baptist ministry and culture, and the ability to work graciously and productively in a variety of environments, and with a variety of people.

The Public Relations Assistant will work closely with the Public Relations Manager and the Public Relations Director, and is expected to understand and respect deadlines and complete all tasks and projects accurately and on time. They will be expected to provide general administrative and public relations support to the Public Relations Director and Public Relations Manager in the areas of communication, fundraising, in-kind gifts, volunteers, special events, traditional media, new and social media, and technology.

The person who works in this capacity must be a mature Christian adult with personal integrity, character and reputation consistent with the standards and ethics expected of any member of The BCV staff. This position requires a congenial personality and a willingness to work effectively with varying personalities both internally and externally. They must also demonstrate a passion for The Baptist Children's Village mission.

To be considered for this position, you will need to complete the full employment application (available on our website www.baptistchildrensvillage.com), which includes a statement of faith and submit it along with a copy of your resume to Celeste Cade, Public Relations Manager, 114 Marketridge Drive, Ridgeland, MS 39157.

Watch Out! • Hebrews 3:7-15

The German Philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel said, "The only thing we learn from history, is that we don't learn from history." Obviously Hegel was not speaking from a Christian worldview, but we can most likely agree with him on that statement. What is it about humanity that we can't seem to learn from the mistakes of previous generations? In this passage the author of Hebrews reminds his current audience about their forefathers' failure during the days of the wilderness wanderings of Israel and how to hopefully avoid the same mistake again with much worse consequences.

Know Your History (7-11) Verse 7 begins the second of several warnings in Hebrews, and in this passage, it is the warning of unbelief. The writer next reminded his readers of the fate of the Israelites when they failed to continue believing God at Kadesh Barnea. His purpose was to help them realize the serious consequences of that behavior and to motivate them to persevere faithfully in the apostles' teaching. This exhortation is really a commentary on Psalm 95:7b-11 in which the writer assumed a correspondence between the successive generations of God's people and consistency in God's character. In verse 6 the writer warned of losing our privilege of serving as priests in the present. Now he

warned of losing some of our privileges as heirs in the future." (*Hebrews, Constable, 36-37*).

"He finds particular significance in the word rest, which in the Psalm described the forfeited entry into the Promised Land, but which for our author is a model for the more ultimate heavenly rest promised to the people of God. If Israel's rebellion cost them the temporal rest of Canaan, how much more should his readers now take care that they do not lose their heavenly rest." (*Hebrews, Expositor's, 61*). The author is calling for an immediate change in direction of the people back toward God through faith in Christ alone. He is beseeching them to not be like their ancestors that rebelled against them in the wilderness. "The perverseness of ingratitude and faithlessness is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the history of the Israelites in the wilderness." (*Hebrews, Hughes, 142*).



Explore the Bible with Shelby Hazzard

Heed the Warning (12) Now he summarizes his admonishment into a single command to not fall away from the living God. "To forsake the living God is always to fall into idolatry. Not that the recipients of this letter were in danger of transferring their worship to images of wood and stone: the constructions of human philosophy and specula-

tion are no less idols, man-made and powerless to save. The essence of all idolatry, whether primitive or sophis-

ticated, is the abandonment of the truth about God for a lie and the worship and service, of the creature rather than the creator (Rom 1:25). These Hebrews were being tempted to relinquish the light of the gospel for the darkness of religious speculation, to trust in the appearance of human and angelic figures rather than in the appearance of Jesus Christ, and to submit to earthly structures and earthly authorities - in short, to turn their back on him who alone is the living God."

(*Hebrews, Hughes, 146*)

Encourage Each Other (13-15) The solution to this problem of an insidious seduction into apathy and unbelief is consistent mutual exhortation in the church between all believers. The writer is saying that as long as this window of grace is open in Christ Jesus before the second coming that none of us may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. In other words, every day of our lives we are to watch one another closely and apply gentle admonishment when we see one another drifting away from the truth, 1 Timothy 4:16, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." As believers, rarely should we say, "it's none of your business what I do or what I believe," because the spiritual health of each other is very much our business. Isolation and absence from the assembly is a great way for the deceitfulness of sin to creep in and consume us.

We must remember our history, learn from the failures of those that came before us and use what we have learned to walk with one another in accountability.

Hazzard is pastor of Woodland Church, Columbus.

Connected Through Words • Ephesians 4:25-32

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me." We teach our children this old saying, trying to keep them from being wounded by unkind or thoughtless words of others. However, anyone old enough to read this lesson knows this expression is far from the truth. We've all been on the receiving end of caustic speech, and the wounds go deep. And most of us will have to admit to delivering hurtful words as well.

This lesson's theme, "Connected Through Words", continues the topic we've been exploring this month: unity. In just a few brief verses, our text in Ephesians 4 has much to say about the use of that small organ that sits behind our teeth, and how it can make or break unity. King David realized the necessity of controlled speech. He penned a good verse to memorize, as well as a great prayer for beginning each new day: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3 NIV).

Verse 24 of our focal passage begins with the word, "Therefore." It's been said, when we see this in Scripture, we'd do well to look back over the previous verses to see what it's "there for". In this case, Paul reminds his Ephesian readers of their former way of life; of things per-

taining to it that were to be "put off" (vs. 22), and of the "new self" that they were to "put on" (vs. 23).

The first thing to put off is lying. This moral fault causes long-term damage to one's reputation. If someone is caught in an untruth, his or her credibility is in question from then on. Would it not be better to "speak truthfully", remembering our one-ness in the body of Christ (vs. 25)? And, of course, our honest speech should reach beyond the church walls to our everyday conversations.

In verse 25, Paul tells us not to sin when we become angry. Sometimes, anger is acceptable, as in the face of injustice. It becomes sinful when it involves self-centered thinking on our part. When this happens, our speech and our actions can do damage. We're not to "let the sun go down while you are still angry" (vs. 26). Anger can erupt with volatility, or it can be stuffed down and smolder inside. Neither of these is

healthy for those desiring a close walk with the Lord, as they negatively impact the individual and others. The boundary of sundown reminds us to deal quickly with the root of anger, and take the necessary steps to put it aside. By not facing the issue, we "give the devil a foothold" (vs. 27).

The "put off" and "put on" concept continues in verse 28. Believers who were thieves before their conversion were instructed to now "make an honest living for themselves" (NCV).

Instead of taking advantage of others, their rightly-received earnings would al-

low them to bless those in need.

Speech aspects come to the forefront again in verse 29. We are to avoid "unwholesome talk". What does that include? Sarcastic remarks, gossip, negative comments, griping, and such would certainly qualify. A good rule of thumb: if we wouldn't say it in Jesus' presence, it shouldn't be said. As we

dismiss this unbecoming speech, we're to replace it with words that build up and benefit the hearers.

In case the church at Ephesus still didn't get the message, Paul gave some more examples of actions and attitudes that had no place in members' lives: "Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks" (vs. 31 PHILLIPS).

Our words and our actions should be such that won't "bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit" (vs. 30 NLT), who has taken up residence within us. Kindness, compassion and forgiveness should be readily evidenced in our lives. Remembering that God, through Christ, has shown us such great mercy, should give us the desire to treat others in like manner.

How can this lesson benefit you? Consider going back through verses 22-32, and make two lists, one of things to "put off" and one of things to "put on". Make an honest assessment of your life. Do you struggle with some things on the "put off" list? Are you weak in some "put on" areas? Ask God for the empowering of the Holy Spirit to make the desired changes.

Maniscalco is a member of Lemoyne Boulevard Church in Biloxi.

Bible Studies for Life

with Ann Maniscalco



WILSON

cont. from p.2

and keeps us in the right position before God.

■ **Pray.** Make prayer a priority in your life. I get up at 4:30 most mornings so I can have that quiet personal

time with God. I need to reset myself daily to remember what the Gospel means. Time in God's Word and time in prayer allows me to die daily to me and to then live daily for Him. God will give you the wisdom you need to lead (James 1:5). Also pray for the men with whom you will lead. There is

something powerful that happens when you pray for others. God will give you His heart for them and it will show up every time in how you interact with them. The men at your table need you to pray for them.

You need a woman friend. As women, we are designed to be in community with other

women. I am so thankful that God has given me deep friendships with other women who listen, encourage, pray, support, and also challenge me. They ask me the hard questions and hold me accountable in key areas of my life. There is a deep level of trust that allows for openness. Our lives are full

but we need other women in our lives. Make room.

Wilson is vice president of the B&H Publishing Group of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville. This commentary first appeared at SelmaWilson.com, and appears here courtesy of Baptist Press.



EGYPT IN TURMOIL — A young girl holds a sign reading 'Egypt Is Free' during the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square. (Photo by Hosam el-Hamalawy/Flickr. Used with permission.)

Forgiveness, persistence noted by Egyptian populace

CAIRO (BP) — A year after more than 85 churches and Christian institutions across Egypt were destroyed and burned, and three years after the country's longest serving president stepped down in the wake of nationwide protests, Christian workers there are finding an openness rarely experienced before.

Some workers noted that forgiveness, along with persistence in sharing the Gospel shown by local Christians toward Muslims, has played a large role in the change.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stepped down after 18 days of nationwide demonstrations during what is now called the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Since then, Egypt has gone through various protests, elections, presidents, and the quake of upheaval.

In August of last year more than 85 churches and Christian institutions were attacked and burned as a result of demonstrations across Egypt calling for an Islamic state.

There was "a profound blow of disgrace and humiliation in this culture of honor," said Ramez Atallah, general director of the Bible Society of Egypt. "The non-retaliation of Christians was both unexpected and unprecedented."

Egyptians are now openly questioning everything, including their faith, and expressing doubts aloud, said Patrick Stein (not his real name), a Christian worker in Egypt and leader of a church-planting team.

Doubting isn't rare, he noted, but to openly challenge beliefs they have held onto is. They are hungry for truth in a way that was not present before the revolution and the ensuing turmoil," Stein said.

"If I am talking to people at a tea shop, people around who are not a part of the conversation will often stop me after

"Are they scared? Of course they are. Are they being obedient and sharing? Yes, they are. Do they sometimes hold back because of the fear? Yes, but not nearly as frequently as we do, and all we face in America is some small social stigma."

Patrick Stein

Christian worker in Egypt

wards and want to know more," he said. "They will ask me their deep questions that have been troubling their hearts for years, but they never felt the ability to put those questions into actual words before."

This year's Ramadan observances held June 28-July 28 provided opportunities for Muslims and Christians in Egypt to continue building relationships, Stein said. Ramadan is the Muslim month of fasting that is observed around the world each year.

"The team had been invited to several iftar dinners and got to share their faith at those," Stein said. Iftar is the evening meal during Ramadan, breaking the fast for each day. These meals allow for relaxed conversations about life and faith.

"When visiting homes it is easy to ask questions about their religious practices during [Ramadan]," said Christian worker Adam Tate (not his real name). "As a result, conversations often lead to the topics of fasting, forgiveness of sin and assurance of salvation."

Stein spends much of his time training local Christians from Coptic and Muslim backgrounds on how to share the Gospel and with whom to share

it, along with finding safe places to practice sharing.

"To be caught evangelizing to a Muslim is, firstly, against the law," Stein said. "They could go to prison for many, many years, lose their businesses, their children would have no income, no way to pay for schools, etc. Many people just disappear in prisons here."

"Are they scared? Of course they are. Are they being obedient and sharing? Yes, they are. Do they sometimes hold back because of the fear? Yes, but not nearly as frequently as we do, and all we face in America is some small social stigma," he said.

"I might be kicked out of Egypt for sharing [but] they may lose their very lives and place their loved ones in danger," Stein said. "Despite the costs and implications of what they are doing might mean, despite many of their families begging them not to share, they continue to share. They inspire me."

Faithful prayers for Egypt and Christians in Egypt have not gone unnoticed by Atallah, Stein, Tate, and other Christian workers here. They recognize God's faithfulness in the prayers, giving and encouragement from around the world.

As a result, "there are people in Egypt who have heard the Gospel, some for the first time," Tate said.

"We don't take for granted our cars and houses," Stein said, noting they are provided through special missions offerings. "We try to use our houses as meeting places for prayer and worship and the mobility of a car allows us to go to communities that would be difficult to get to without a private vehicle," he said.

Stein added, "Often our families seem to be attacked by sickness and discouragement from the enemy [Satan], yet we know that people around the world are lifting us up, which gives us persistence and perseverance."

Ebola fears fuel growing distrust, treatment delays

MONROVIA, Liberia (BP) — As the deadly Ebola epidemic in West Africa continues to spread, many Africans find themselves being forced to take precautions that are counter to their culture, report Christian workers in the region.

"Africans live and love community," said Sam Gardner (not his real name), a physician and Christian worker in West Africa. "Greetings as well as farewells in African life are very important. When not done properly, or neglected, offense is taken."

Gardner said attempts to get people not to shake hands, because doing so could transmit the Ebola virus, runs against a lifetime of experience. "They have a hard time seeing themselves outside of the group. That is why many resist going to the hospital, or hide their illnesses."

Descriptions of quarantine and being isolated from friends and family do not sit well with the African mind, workers say. For this reason, many delay seeking help against other illnesses that contain symptoms that are similar to Ebola.

"More people are dying of malaria now than they ever have," Rebecca Waters, a Christian worker in West Africa, said. "The reason is because when they get malaria symptoms, they do not get treatment. If they do, they will be sent directly to the Ebola testing center, and of course they all know that is called the place where people go to die."

According to related media reports and the World Health Organization (WHO), there have been more than 1,550 deaths due to the Ebola virus since March. Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have seen the majority of the more than 3,000 reported cases, but Nigeria, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are now also reporting outbreaks.

Some Africans refuse to believe the numbers. "It is becoming more and more common that people are believing that Ebola is not a problem, and that the media is blowing it out of proportion," Waters said. "They are saying that the numbers are wrong and that it is all a conspiracy."

Yet, WHO has warned the number of cases could reach 20,000, because Ebola is spreading so rapidly. Fear is becoming a larger problem than the problem itself, Christian workers say.

"We have heard stories of Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders convoys being run out of villages by people with rocks and machetes," said Rachel Hays (not his real name), a Christian worker in the region. "They fear those that are trying to help them because they now believe that it is the white man who brought Ebola here in the first place and that they are not here to help, but to infect everyone."

Superstition and traditional religion promote fears that keep Africans from receiving treatment. One of these superstitions includes burial of the dead.

"Funerals are important affairs with many rituals," Gardner said. "There are those who believe that if the body is not handled properly, their loved one would not fare well in the afterlife. Bodies must be cleansed and placed in the ground a certain way within 24 hours."

Many Africans believe that the higher attendance at a funeral corresponds with the righteousness of the deceased one's life.

"This is why so often people want to bury their own dead in their way," Gardner said. "Grief and these pressures keep the family of the deceased from listening to efforts to explain that Ebola can be transmitted by contact with dead bodies."



DIFFERENT TIMES — Because of the rapid spread of the deadly Ebola virus, health workers in infected villages in Guinea take every precaution they can to keep it from spreading. (©EC/ECHO/Jean-Louis Mosser)